

CHAPTER 8

Al-Anfâl: Voluntary Gifts

(REVEALED AT MADINAH: 10 *sections*; 75 *verses*)

As this chapter deals with the battle of Badr, the first battle which the Muslims had to fight, it goes under the name of *Anfâl*, which means literally *voluntary gifts*, though it has also been applied to gains acquired in war, or what is generally called *spoils of war*. I prefer, however, the literal significance of the word. The battle had to be fought, yet the Muslim State had at the time no treasury, nor any arsenal, nor an army. Voluntary gifts were therefore called for, and not only this battle but all the succeeding battles which the Muslims had to fight were carried on only by voluntary gifts. The opening verses of the chapter lend support to this significance, as there we are told how the Muslims should prepare themselves for war.

The chapter opens with certain statements necessary to a preparation for the battle, among which is the giving of free gifts, settling up of all internal differences and being lowly and humble before Allâh. The latter part of the first section and this second section deal with the battle of Badr. The third section points out the way to success, the essence of which is obedience and faithfulness to the Holy Prophet, which the companions unwaveringly exhibited in this battle, under the most trying circumstances. The fourth section refers to the successful issue of the war. After pointing out the plans of the opponents against the Prophet, it states that the Muslims will be made the guardians of the Sacred Mosque at Makkah, and that disbelievers will no more have any access to it. The fifth refers to the great value of the success in the battle of Badr as a sign of the Prophet's truth. As regards numbers, the Muslims were only a third of the number of their opponents and as regards the efficiency of this small force, which consisted mostly of old men and raw and inexperienced youths, it was nothing as compared with the strong and sturdy Makkan warriors. The sixth indicates that success did not depend on numbers and weapons; while the seventh proceeds to show that the battle had completely undermined the enemy's strength, referring in conclusion to the treaties of peace which the Arab tribes now sought to establish with the Muslims, but which later on they frequently violated. The eighth

section directs the Muslims to be ready to deal a blow and to be well-equipped, because they could only hope to secure peace by strength and readiness. The ninth informs them that they will have to fight against even ten times their number, and thus really gives them to understand that they must be prepared to meet overwhelming numbers. The last section explains how far those Muslims should be assisted who had chosen to remain with their polytheistic brethren, laying emphasis on the sacredness of treaties made, even with unbelieving tribes.

The battle of Badr, which forms the chief topic of this chapter, is frequently referred to as the *Furqân* or the Criterion, in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân, and has already been referred to as such in the third chapter. In the historical order of events this chapter should have taken its place after the second chapter; but owing to its peculiar nature as affording proof of the truth of the Prophet's mission, it finds its proper place after a full discussion of prophethood in the last chapter, and thus affords an illustration in the Prophet's own life of that discomfiture which overtakes the opponents of prophets, as illustrated by reference to the histories of earlier prophets in the last chapter. The major portion was undoubtedly revealed either immediately before or immediately after the battle of Badr, i.e. in the second year of the Hijrah; but the concluding verses of the seventh section and the eighth section, containing as they do clear references to the repeated violation of agreements by the disbelievers, must have been revealed during the period preceding the conquest of Makkah, or possibly in that immediately following, as these violations ultimately led to the declaration of immunity, which finds expression in the chapter that follows. Verses 30–35, which are supposed by some to have been revealed at Makkah, are really references to past history, to which attention is called to encourage the Muslims under the new difficulties.

SECTION 1: The Battle of Badr

In the name of Allâh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

1 They ask thee about voluntary gifts. Say: Voluntary gifts are for Allâh and the Messenger.^a So keep your duty to Allâh and set aright your differences, and obey Allâh and His Messenger, if you are believers.

2 They only are believers whose hearts are full of fear when Allâh is mentioned, and when His messages are recited to them they increase them in faith, and in their *Rabb* do they trust,

3 Those who keep up prayer and spend out of what We have given them.

4 These are the believers in truth. For them, are with their *Rabb* exalted grades and protection and an honourable sustenance.

5 Even as your *Rabb* caused you to go forth from your house with truth, though a party of the believers were surely averse,^a

1a. *Nafl*, pl. *nawâfil*, means *an act performed voluntarily*, such as supererogatory prayers, and *nafal*, pl. *Anfâl*, means *an addition or accession to what is due, a free or voluntary gift; also spoils of war*. There is much difference of opinion among the commentators as to what is meant by *Anfâl* here. The most generally received opinion is that it means property acquired during the war, being in this sense synonymous with *ghanîmah*. The orders regarding the distribution of property acquired in war, the *ghanîmah*, are, however, contained further on in verse 41. According to *Al-Mufradât fî Gharîb al-Qur'ân* (Dictionary of Qur'ân), by Shaikh Abu-l- Qâsim Al-Husain al-Râghib al-Isfahânî, *anfâl* means gain which accrues *without one's labouring for it*, and on this basis some authorities take the word as meaning *gains in war, when actually there has been no war*, but the proper word for it is *fai'*, for which see 59:7. As all gains of war fall under the definition of *ghanîmah* or *fai'*, I take the word *anfâl* as carrying here its literal significance of *voluntary gifts* for the advancement of the cause of Islâm, such voluntary gifts being most needed at a time when the very life of Islâm was threatened. Indeed there is no better justification for a war than that it is carried on by the voluntary gifts of those whose life is in danger. It is the only war that is really carried on by the people in self-defence. Wars carried on by huge loans which ultimately crush a people are really wars of capitalists against the people themselves.

6 Disputing with you about the truth after it had become clear — as if they were being driven to death while they saw (it).

7 And when Allâh promised you one of the two parties that it should be yours, and you loved that the one not armed should be yours,^a and Allâh desired to establish the Truth by His words,^b and to cut off the root of the disbelievers —

5a. The circumstances of the battle of Badr have been misunderstood, even by some Muslims. Christian opinion on the point is summed up in Palmer's note: "The occasion alluded to was one when Muḥammad had made preparations for attacking an unarmed caravan on its way from Syria to Mecca, when Abû Sufyân, who was in charge of it, sent word to Mecca and obtained an escort of nearly a thousand men; many of Muḥammad's followers wished to attack the caravan only, but the Prophet and his immediate followers were for throwing themselves on the escort".

While the several incidents mentioned here are separately true, there is a misconception as to their relation to each other. It is true that a caravan was returning from Syria, and an army had marched forth from Makkah; it is also true that some of the Muslims wished that they should encounter the caravan and not face the Makkan force. Had the Holy Prophet desired to plunder the caravan, he would have done so long before Abû Sufyân could obtain succour from Makkah. Madînah was situated at a distance of thirteen days' journey from Makkah, so that if the Holy Prophet had actually an idea of plundering the caravan when it approached Madînah, succour could not have reached Abû Sufyân in less than a month, even if he had been apprised of the Holy Prophet's intentions and had sent for aid from Makkah. And why should the Prophet have waited all this while and not plundered the caravan before help reached Abû Sufyân?

Badr, where the encounter took place, lies at a distance of three days' journey from Madînah. Here, marching towards each other, the two armies met. This shows that the Makkan army had long been on its way to Madînah, while the Muslims were as yet quite unprepared. The enemy had marched forth for ten days and the Muslims only for three days when the two forces encountered each other, which shows clearly that the Muslims had turned out to take the defensive against an invading force. The Prophet had never any design of plundering the caravan, for if he had any such design he could have carried it out long before the Makkan force had approached Madînah, and his hands would thus have been strengthened to meet a powerful enemy. It is quite clear that the Holy Prophet only marched forth when the enemy had already travelled over three-fourths of the way to Madînah, and the caravan had left Madînah far behind.

Further, it is clearly stated here that a party of the believers were averse to fighting. They could not have been averse if they had to encounter only an unarmed caravan. What is said in the next verse makes it clearer still; *they went forth as if they*

were being driven to death, because they knew that they were going to meet an enemy not only treble in numbers, but also much more powerful and efficient.

7a. The two parties referred to were the unarmed caravan of the Quraish going to Makkah and the armed force of the Quraish that was on its way to Madînah. Naturally, some of the Muslims desired that their encounter should take place with the unarmed Quraish caravan, which was now a long way from Madînah, and not with the powerful army which was advancing against Madînah.

8 That He might cause the Truth to triumph and bring the falsehood to naught, though the guilty disliked.

9 When you sought the aid of your Lord, so He answered you: I will assist you with a thousand of the *malâ'ikah* following one another.

10 And Allâh gave it only as good news, and that your hearts might be at ease thereby. And victory is only from Allâh; surely Allâh is Mighty, Wise.^a

7b. By *His words* is meant here *the fulfilment of His words*, because the Prophet had declared at Makkah, long before the fight actually took place, that an encounter would take place between the Muslims and the Quraish, in which the former would be victorious. These prophecies had hitherto been laughed at by the Makkans, because they could never imagine that their power could be broken by such an insignificant community. Of the many prophecies which will be noted in their proper place, I may refer here to one which the Holy Prophet himself repeated aloud in the field. I'Ab says that the Holy Prophet prayed on the day of Badr, saying: "O Allâh, I beseech Thee to fulfil Thy promise and Thy compact! O Allâh, if You please (to destroy this community), You will not be worshipped (on earth)!" Then the Holy Prophet came forth and he cried: "Soon shall the hosts be routed and they will show their backs" (Bukhârî 56:89). Now these concluding words occur in 54:45, which is one of the earliest Makkan revelations, and the incident shows that the importance of the battle of Badr lay in the many prophecies which by their fulfilment bore witness to the truth of the Holy Prophet.

10a. Compare 3:124, where the coming down of *malâ'ikah* in the battle of Uḥud is mentioned. Also see 3:124a, which explains the object of the coming of the *malâ'ikah*. It is nowhere stated in the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân that the *malâ'ikah* actually fought, but here, as in 3:126, we are told that the *malâ'ikah* were sent down to

bear good news of victory and to ease the hearts of the Muslims. Here, however, we are further told (verse 11) that, as a result of the coming of the *malâ'ikah*, calm fell upon the Muslims, their hearts being strengthened and their footsteps being steadied, and (verse 12) that while the believers were thus made firm, terror was cast into the hearts of the disbelievers. Hence it is that the number of angels corresponds with the strength of the enemy force in each case, their number being one thousand at Badr, where the enemy had a like force. For the other two occasions, see 3:124a.

SECTION 2: The Battle of Badr

11 When He made slumber fall on you as a security from Him, and sent down upon you water from the clouds that He might thereby purify you,^a and take away from you the uncleanness of the *shaitân*, and that He might fortify your hearts and make firm (your) feet thereby.^b

12 When your *Rabb* revealed to the *Malâ'ikah*: I am with you, so make firm those who believe. I will cast terror into the hearts of those who disbelieve. So smite above the necks and smite every finger-tip of them.^a

13 This is because they opposed Allâh and His Messenger. And whoever opposes Allâh and His Messenger — then surely Allâh is Severe in requiting.

14 This — taste it, and (know) that for the disbelievers is the chastisement of the Fire.^a

11a. Compare 25:25, which is a prophecy about the events of this remarkable battle: “And on the day when the *samâ'* bursts asunder with clouds, and the *malâ'ikah* are sent down, as they are sent”. The rainfall brought many advantages to the Muslims, for which see next footnote.

11b. Before the rain fell the Muslim position was very weak. The enemy had the command of the water and the Muslims were in a low and sandy place. Therefore there were some who had misgivings, which, as is said here, were due to the *shaitân*'s uncleanness. The enemy having taken possession of the drinking-water, the Muslims feared being troubled by thirst, which is called *the shaitân of the desert*. The rain strengthened the position of the Muslims and consequently comforted their hearts. This was purification, for after the rainfall they all became certain of Divine help and so of their triumph over the enemy.

12a. The last sentence is apparently addressed to the fighting believers. *Smiting above the necks* is either the same as *smiting the necks*, or it signifies *the striking of the heads*, because what is above the neck is the head. And the striking of the finger-tips indicates the striking of the hands which held weapons to kill the Muslims. The two phrases respectively signify the killing of the enemy and disabling him so as to render him unfit for taking further part in fighting.

15 O you who believe, when you meet those who disbelieve marching for war, turn not your backs to them.^a

16 And whoso turns his back to them on that day — unless manoeuvring for battle or turning to join a company — he, indeed, incurs Allâh's wrath and his refuge is hell. And an evil destination it is.

17 So you slew them not but Allâh slew them, and you smote not when you did smite (the enemy), but Allâh smote (him),^a and that He might confer upon the believers a Benefit^b from Himself. Surely Allâh is Hearing, Knowing.

14a. That is, taste this torment in this life as an indication of the chastisement of Fire in the next life.

15a. *Zahafa* originally means *he walked or marched little by little*, and applies to the crawling along of a child when unable to walk. Then *zahf* came to mean *an army or military force marching little by little towards the enemy*, or *heavily by reason of their multitude and force* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). Thus it became synonymous with *war*, as in a *ḥadīth* quoted by *Tâj al-'Arūs* (Dictionary), by *Imâm Muḥibb al-Dîn Abu-l-Fa'id Murtaḍâ*, *farra min al-zahf*, which means *he fled from war* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

17a. *Ramâ* carries a number of significances, *throwing, flinging, casting, assailing, smiting, shooting, going forth*, etc. (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane). It is used in connection with fighting, and therefore I adopt *smiting* as its equivalent, which, like its original, makes the meaning clear without seeking an understood object. The first part of the verse refers to the Muslims generally — *So you slew them not, but Allâh slew them*, the address being in the plural; and the second part, being in the singular, is understood as referring to the Holy Prophet. Otherwise there is no difference between the two passages. The Muslims slew the enemy, but it is affirmed that really they did not slay, but it was Allâh Who slew them; the meaning

apparently being that Allâh's hand was working in the battle, which is also clear from the fact that three hundred, mostly raw, young men, equipped with neither horses nor arms, prevailed against a thousand of the most renowned warriors. The same meaning must be attached to the other passage relating to the smiting of the enemy. Whether the Prophet actually threw a handful of pebbles at the enemy, which discomfited the latter, is a different question. It is sufficient to learn that a powerful enemy was discomfited by about a third of its number, while from the point of view of efficiency and equipment even ten men from among the Muslims were not equal to one of the enemy. It was Allâh's hand that slew them, and it was His hand that smote them and ultimately put them to rout. That the Prophet actually threw a handful of dust at the enemy is in no way inconsistent with this explanation.

17b. *Iblâ'*, though ordinarily meaning *trying*, and *proving*, like *balâ'* and *ibtilâ'* (two other verbs from the same root), means here, by the unanimous opinion of all commentators, *the conferring of a favour* (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). The lexicons also give it the same significance. Thus LL explains the words *ablâ-hu balâ'* - *an ḥasan-an* as meaning, *Allâh did to him a good deed or conferred a benefit on him. The good gift or the benefit* spoken of here is a victory which strengthened the foundations of Islâm, and dealt a death-blow to the evil designs of those who were determined to exterminate it, as is plainly stated in the next verse.

18 This^a — and (know) that Allâh will weaken the struggle of the disbelievers.

19 If you sought a judgment, the judgment has indeed come to you;^a and if you desist, it is better for you. And if you return (to fight), We (too) shall return and your forces will avail you nothing, though they may be many; and (know) that Allâh is with the believers.

SECTION 3: The Way to Success

20 O you who believe, obey Allâh and His Messenger and turn not away from Him while you hear.

21 And be not like those who say, We hear; and they hear not.

22 Surely the vilest of beasts,^a in Allah's sight, are the deaf, the dumb, who understand not.

18a. *This* here stands for, *this was the Divine purpose in bringing about this encounter.*

19a. It is related that when the Quraish left Makkah to attack the Muslims, they held on to the curtains of the Ka‘bah and prayed thus: “O Allâh, assist the best of the two forces and the most rightly directed of the two parties and the most honoured of the two groups and the most excellent of the two religions”. Others say that Abû Jahl prayed in the field of battle, saying: “O Allâh, whoever of us is the greater cutter of the ties of relationship and more wicked, destroy him tomorrow morning” (*Al-Tafsîr al-Kabîr* (Commentary), by Imâm Fakhr al-Dîn Râzî). Palmer’s remark in this connection, that the Quraish prayed in the above words “when they were threatened with an attack from Muḥammad”, is a travesty of the facts. Indeed, it is utterly absurd to speak of Muḥammad *threatening* the Quraish, when the Muslims did not constitute even a thousandth part of the whole population of Arabia, and their military strength was almost negligible as compared with the Quraish.

22a. *Dâbbah* means literally *anything that walks (or creeps or crawls) upon the earth* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane); hence any animal, or a beast, or any living thing. Note that the deaf and the dumb signify those who are devotionally deaf and dumb — *those who do not understand.*

23 And if Allâh had known any good in them, He would have made them hear. And if He makes them hear, they would turn away while they are averse.

24 O you who believe, respond to Allâh and His Messenger, when he calls you to that which gives you life.^a And know that Allâh comes in between a man and his heart,^b and that to Him you will be gathered.

25 And guard yourselves against an affliction which may not smite those of you exclusively who are unjust;^a and know that Allâh is Severe in requiting.

26 And remember when you were few, deemed weak in the land, fearing lest people should carry you off by force,^a He sheltered you and strengthened you with His help, and gave you of the good things that you might give thanks.

27 O you who believe, be not unfaithful to Allâh and the Messenger, nor be unfaithful to your trusts, while you know.

24a. *Faith* or submission to Allâh is *life*, and *disbelief* is *death*. By the expression *that which gives you life* some understand the *Qur'ân*, others take it to mean *jihad*, or exertion in the cause of truth. Evidently it is *faith*.

24b. By *heart* is meant *the desires of the heart*. The Divine intervention is the cutting off of those desires. The faithful are enjoined to be quick in responding to the call of the Prophet, and not to indulge in worldly desires, for these may soon be cut off. Or, the meaning is that they must respond to the call of the Prophet lest, having deprived themselves of one occasion of doing good, the heart should be hardened, and, as a punishment for the first rejection, Allâh may so turn it that it may not turn to good at all.

25a. The reference is not to one particular incident, but generally to all afflictions that are of such a widespread nature as to overtake even others, in addition to those for whom they are primarily intended.

26a. There was a time when the Muslims were so weak that they could be carried off by force. Such was their condition at Makkah. In Madînah they were undoubtedly securer, and the enemy had to collect a force to crush them. Or, the *help* referred to here is the Divine help which the Muslims received in the battle of Badr.

28 And know that your wealth and your children are a temptation, and that Allâh is He with Whom there is a mighty reward.

SECTION 4: Muslims to be Guardians of the Sacred Mosque

29 O you who believe, if you keep your duty to Allâh, He will grant you a distinction and do away with your evils and protect you. And Allâh is the Lord of mighty grace.

30 And when those who disbelieved devised plans against thee that they might confine thee or slay thee or drive thee away — and they devised plans and Allâh, too, had arranged a plan; and Allâh is the best of planners.^a

31 And when Our messages are recited to them, they say: We have heard. If we wished, we could say the like of it;^a this is nothing but the stories of the ancients.

32 And when they said: O Allâh, if this is indeed the truth from You, then rain down on us stones from (the) *samâ'* or inflict on us a painful chastisement.

30a. The reference is to the final plans of the Quraish when, the companions having emigrated to Madīnah, the Prophet was left alone at Makkah. Various plans were suggested at a great meeting of the Quraish chiefs in their town hall; the plan ultimately adopted was that the Prophet should be slain, a number of youths belonging to different tribes thrusting their swords into his body at one and the same time, so that one man or tribe should not have the charge laid against him or it. It was with this object that the Prophet's house was surrounded, but he got away unnoticed (Abû Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mâlik *ibn Hishâm* (Historian). The Divine plan was that the disbelievers should see the downfall of their power at the hands of the Prophet.

31a. That this was an empty boast is confirmed by the fact that, although the Arabic Glorious Qur'ân repeatedly challenged them to produce anything like it, they could not produce even the like of its shortest chapter.

33 And Allâh would not chastise them while you was among them; nor would Allâh chastise them while they seek forgiveness.^a

34 And what excuse have they that Allâh should not chastise them while they hinder (human beings) from the Sacred Mosque and they are not its (true) guardians? Its guardians are only those who keep their duty, but most of them know not.^a

35 And their prayer at the House is nothing but whistling and clapping of hands.^a Taste, then, the chastisement, because you disbelieved.

36 Surely those who disbelieve spend their wealth to hinder (people) from the way of Allâh. So they will go on spending it, then it will be to them regret, and then they will be overcome. And those who disbelieve will be gathered together to hell,

37 That Allâh may separate the wicked from the good, and put the wicked one upon another, then heap them together, then cast them into hell. These indeed are the losers.

33a. The punishment was to overtake them when the Holy Prophet was no more among them, i.e. after his flight from Makkah. But even then the punishment might be averted, if they asked for forgiveness.

34a. The disbelievers are here declared not to be the true guardians of the Sacred Mosque, because while that Mosque was an emblem of the Unity of the Divine Being, its name having been clearly associated with monotheism since the time of Ibrâhîm, the disbelievers who now posed as its guardians were idolaters. So they are told that

they are unfit to hold its guardianship, which would henceforth be made over to a people who keep their duty, i.e. the Muslims. The words contain a prophecy not only as to the deprivation of the disbelieving Quraish of the guardianship of the Ka‘bah, but also as to the passing of the guardianship into the hands of the Muslims.

35a. In fact the House was not used by them for offering prayers to Allâh but for sacrilegious talk and gossiping.

SECTION 5: Badr as a Sign of the Prophet’s Truth

38 Say to those who disbelieve, if they desist, that which is past will be forgiven them; and if they return,^a then the example of those of old has already gone.^b

39 And fight with them until there is no more persecution, and all religions are for Allâh. But if they desist, then surely Allâh is Seer of what they do.^a

40 And if they turn back, then know that Allâh is your Patron. Most excellent the Patron and most excellent the Helper!^a

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41 And know that whatever you acquire in war, a fifth of it is for Allâh and for the Messenger and for the near of kin and the orphans and the needy and the wayfarer, if you believe in Allâh and in that which We revealed to Our servant, on the day of Discrimination, the day on which the two parties met. And Allâh is Possessor of power over all things.^a

38a. Desisting and returning both relate to *fighting against the Muslims*, not to unbelief, because the unbelievers could not be said *to return* to disbelief. They had gone away from Badr quite discomfited, and they were told that, if they desisted from fighting, they would be forgiven.

38b. The meaning is that they could read their own doom in the doom of those with whom Allâh had dealt previously in similar circumstances. Compare 18:55, which states that the disbelievers only wait “for the way of the ancients to overtake them.”

39a. That is, if they desist from fighting and put an end to their mischief, Allâh’s decree of punishment will not be executed. Allâh sees what human beings do, and if

they mend their ways, He will not punish them. The state of religious liberty which Islâm aimed at is put tersely in the two opening statements — *there is no more persecution and all religions are for Allâh*.

40a. If they return to fight, then Allâh will protect the Muslim community, helping them against their enemy, as He is their Patron and Helper.

42 When you were on the nearer side (of the valley) and they were on the farther side, while the caravan was in a lower place than you.^a And if you had tried to make a mutual appointment, you would certainly have broken away from the appointment,^b but^c — in order that Allâh might bring about a matter which had to be done;^d that he who perished by clear argument might perish, and he who lived by clear argument might live.^e And surely Allâh is Hearing, Knowing:

41a. *Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane explains *ghanama* as meaning *he acquired a thing without difficulty*. Hence the original meaning of the word *ghansmah* is simply *acquisition* or *achievement*, and the word is then applied to what is acquired in war after fighting with the enemy and vanquishing him, and is a technical term for such property.

Regarding the one-fifth spoken of here, the most generally accepted opinion is that it is to be divided again into five parts, the Prophet, the near of kin, the orphans, the poor, and the wayfarer being equal sharers. The near of kin included all individuals belonging to the tribes of Banî Hâshim and Banî ‘Abd al-Muttalib, to whom zakât money was not allowed. The poor among them were thus paid from this source of income. As to the Prophet’s twenty-fifth, it appears that it was also used for the benefit of the Muslims. The words of one of his sayings are: *wa-l-khumsu mardûd-un fî-kum*, i.e. *the fifth (too) is given back to you*. That the Prophet led a life of the utmost simplicity is admitted on all hands. The remaining four-fifths of the *ghansmah* were divided among those who took part in the battle, as they were not otherwise paid for their services, but there is no order to this effect in the Qur’ân itself. It may be further noted that this arrangement was simply an exigency. The war was forced on the Muslims all of a sudden when the State had not yet been formed in the proper sense of the word; there was no army at all, nor a treasury from which to pay it; and just as they were required to carry it on the basis of voluntary gifts, so they were allowed a share in the war acquisitions. If the State pays its soldiers as it pays its civil servants, the war acquisitions would all go to the State treasury, just as income from

zakât or tribute went to the State treasury. It is nowhere laid down that the Muslim State shall not maintain a regular army.

The day of Discrimination referred to here is the battle of Badr. It is so called because prophecies of an encounter between the Muslims and their enemies and of the vanquishment of the enemy are met with in very early revelations. See also 3:13a.

42a. The position of the three parties, i.e. the party of the Muslims and two parties of the Quraish, is here made clear. The Muslims were on the nearer side, i.e. *the side nearer to Madînah*, the main army of the Quraish was on the further side, i.e. *the side which was farther from Madînah*, while the caravan was in a lower place, i.e. *towards the sea-coast*, and farther away from Madînah, on its way to Makkah.

42b. The Muslims were so weak that they could not think of making an appointment with the enemy — they would have broken away from the appointment.

42c. There is an ellipsis here, the meaning being, *but an encounter was brought about without an appointment*.

43 When Allah showed them to thee in thy dream as few — and if He had shown them to thee as many, you would certainly have become weak-hearted and you would have disputed about the matter, but Allâh saved (you). Surely He is Knower of what is in the breasts.

44 And when He showed them to you, when you met, as few in your eyes, and He made you to appear few in their eyes, in order that Allâh might bring about a matter which had to be done. And to Allâh are all affairs returned.^a

SECTION 6: Success does not depend on Numbers

45 O you who believe, when you meet an army, be firm, and remember Allâh much, that you may be successful.

42d. The matter *had to be done*, i.e., Allâh had decided to do it. *Maf'ûl* means literally *a thing already done*, the use of the past tense when the occurrence is certain being frequent in Arabic. The matter referred to is the vanquishment of the opponents of Islâm.

42e. The disbelievers had seen clear arguments of the Prophet's truth, yet they rejected him and had thus perished in a spiritual sense; they were now vanquished in the battle and thus perished temporally. Or, the meaning is that *those who would perish might perish by clear argument and those who would live might live by clear argument*, the battle itself being the clear argument referred to here.

44a. In the previous verse it is stated that the enemy were shown to the Prophet in a dream to be few, and here we are told that they were also shown to be few to the Muslims when the two armies met. The second point has been fully explained in 3:13a. As regards the Prophet's seeing those few in a vision, it must no doubt be interpreted as signifying their actual weakness, notwithstanding their great number.

46 And obey Allâh and His Messenger and dispute not one with another, lest you get weak-hearted and your power depart; and be steadfast. Surely Allâh is with the steadfast.

47 And be not like those who came forth from their homes exultingly and to be seen of human beings, and they hinder (people) from the way of Allâh.^a And Allâh encompasses what they do.

48 And when the *shaitân*^a made their works fair-seeming to them, and said: None among human beings can overcome you this day, and I am your protector. But when the two armies came in sight of one another, he turned upon his heels, and said: Surely I am clear of you; I see what you see not; surely I fear Allâh. And Allâh is Severe in requiting.

SECTION 7: Enemy's Strength weakened

49 And when the hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease said: Their religion has deluded them. And whoever trusts in Allâh, then surely Allâh is Mighty, Wise.

50 And if you could see when the *malâ'ikah* cause to die those who disbelieve, smiting their faces and their backs, and (saying): Taste the punishment of burning.

51 This is for that which your own hands have sent on before, and because Allâh is not in the least unjust to the servants—

47a. The reference is clearly to the army of the Quraish, which had marched forth in great exultation to destroy Madīnah.

48a. The person referred to here is said to have been Surâqah ibn Mâlik, who was of the tribe of Banî Bakr, a branch of Banî Kanânah. When setting out to attack Madînah, the Quraish had a fear that the Banî Kanânah, who was their inveterate enemies, might attack Makkah in their absence. Surâqah gave them promise of help. It may be, however, that what is stated here is only the devil's suggestion to the Quraish leaders.

52 In the manner of the people of Pharaoh and those before them, they disbelieved in Allâh's messages, so Allâh punished them for their sins. Surely Allâh is Strong, Severe in requiting.^a

53 This is because Allâh never changes a favour which He has conferred upon a people until they change their own condition — and because Allâh is Hearing, Knowing —

54 In the manner of the people of Pharaoh, and those before them. They rejected the messages of their Lord, so We destroyed them for their sins. And We drowned Pharaoh's people and they were all wrongdoers.

55 Surely the vilest of beasts in Allâh's sight are those who disbelieve, then they would not believe.

56 Those with whom you make an agreement, then they break their agreement every time, and they keep not their duty.^a

57 So if you overtake them in war, scatter by them those who are behind them, that they may be mindful.^a

58 And if you fear treachery on the part of a people, throw back to them (their treaty) on terms of equality. Surely Allâh loves not the treacherous.^a

52a. The mention of the people of Pharaoh here serves to show the Prophet's likeness to Mûsâ and foretells the absolute discomfiture of the enemy ultimately.

56a. It shows how the opponents of Islâm disregarded their responsibility and violated their agreements. The use of the words *every time* with regard to these violations shows clearly that the Muslims never hesitated in making a new agreement when one was violated, but the disbelievers did not even then respect their agreements; hence, as a last resort, the Muslims were allowed to repudiate un-respected agreements (verse 58).

57a. That is, an exemplary punishment should be inflicted on them, so that a stop might be put to further fighting and bloodshed.

SECTION 8: Peace to be secured by Strength

59 And let not those who disbelieve think that they can outstrip (Us). Surely they cannot escape.

60 And make ready for them whatever force you can and horses tied at the frontier, to frighten thereby the enemy of Allâh and your enemy and others besides them, whom you know not — Allâh knows them.^a And whatever you spend in Allâh's way, it will be paid back to you fully and you will not be wronged.

61 And if they incline to peace, incline you also to it, and trust in Allâh. Surely He is the Hearer, the Knower.

62 And if they intend to deceive you,^a then surely Allâh is sufficient for you. He it is Who strengthened you with His help and with the believers,

58a. If the other party does not remain faithful to the agreement of peace, the Muslims may also repudiate it. The use of the word *fear* does not indicate that a mere apprehension, unattended with any action on the part of the other party, is sufficient for repudiation. Read it along with verse 62, and the meaning is clear.

60a. *Force* (Arabic *quwwah*) means *all those things which are a source of strength, including all kinds of implements of war and other defensive and offensive operations*. The Muslims had won a victory at Badr, though they were not even well-equipped and had made no preparation for the war. But they are told that they must in future keep themselves well prepared and avail themselves of all sources of strength, so that the enemy should by their very preparedness assume a peaceful attitude. It was evident that the weakness of the Muslims was a temptation for their opponents to attack them.

62a. The deceit is in relation to what has been said in the previous verse, the meaning being that *if they intend to deceive thee under cloak of peace*, even in such a case peace is to be accepted.

63 And He has united their hearts. If you had spent all that is in the earth, you could not have united their hearts, but Allâh united them. Surely He is Mighty, Wise.

64 O Prophet, Allâh is sufficient for you and those who follow you of the believers.

SECTION 9: Muslims to meet Overwhelming Numbers

65 O Prophet, urge the believers to fight.^a If there be of you twenty steadfast, they shall overcome two hundred; and if there be of you a hundred, they shall overcome a thousand of those who disbelieve, because they are a people who do not understand.^b

66 Now Allâh has lightened your burden and He knows that there is weakness in you. So if there be of you a hundred steadfast, they shall overcome two hundred; and if there be of you a thousand, they shall overcome two thousand by Allâh's permission. And Allâh is with the steadfast.^a

65a. It should be noted that the war to which the Muslims were to be urged was the defensive war which the Muslims had to fight to save themselves and to protect the religion of Islâm. The sword had been taken up against them; see 2:190, 2:217, 22:39, etc.

65b. The Muslims were very few as compared with their enemies, and there was not even one Muslim to ten disbelievers. Thus there is a clear prophecy here that, notwithstanding their fewer numbers, the Muslims shall be victorious. After the battle of Badr, came the battle of Uhud, in which the Muslims were less than 1 to 4 against the enemy; this was followed by the battle of the Ahzâb, in which they were 1 to 10, yet the enemy was routed.

66a. This verse is supposed by some to abrogate the previous verse, where it is stated that twenty patient Muslims shall overcome two hundred disbelievers. This is not a correct view. Firstly, because only an injunction could be said to be abrogated, and not a statement. Secondly, because the two statements relate to two different states of the Muslims. At the time of the battle of Badr there was no Muslim army in existence. Every man available, young or old, sick or healthy had to fight to save the life of the community. They had very few arms, and they had never been trained. This is referred to in the words; *He knows that there is weakness in you*. So the Muslim forces as then constituted could at most be a match for double their numbers. But a time did come when they were a match for ten times their numbers. So both the statements in the Qur'ân proved true. But even if the words may be taken as an injunction to the Muslims to overcome twice and afterwards ten times their numbers, there is no question of abrogation. There are two commandments, one in accordance with the circumstances of the Muslim society as it was then, another in accordance with a future state when they would be well armed.

67 It is not fit for a prophet to take captives unless he has fought and triumphed in the land. You desire the frail goods of this world, while Allâh desires (for you) the Hereafter. And Allâh is Mighty, Wise.^a

68 Were it not for an ordinance from Allâh that had gone before,^a surely there would have befallen you a great chastisement for what you were going to do.^b

67a. There exists some misunderstanding as to the meaning of *yuthkhina* used here. *Thakhuna* means *he* or *it became thick*, and *athkhana* means *ghalaba*, *he overcame* (*Lisân al-‘Arab* (Dictionary), by ‘Allâmah Abu-l-Faḍl Jamâl al-Dîn Muḥammad ibn Mukarram). The same word is again used in the Arabic Glorious Qur’ân exactly in the same sense: “then, when you have *overcome* them, make them prisoners” (47:4).

On the authority of certain reports, the commentators are of opinion that this verse and the next refer to releasing the prisoners of war taken at Badr after taking ransom from them, which act, it is said, is here disapproved. But various considerations show that these verses refer to some other incidents. Firstly, the condition laid down here for taking prisoners is that the Prophet should fight against the enemy, and that had actually been done at Badr. Secondly, the taking of prisoners and their release on this very occasion is justified in clear words only two verses further on, “O Prophet, say to those of the captives who are in your hands: If Allâh knows anything good in your hearts, He will give you better than that which has been taken from you” (verse 70 of chapter 8). This shows that these verses were revealed when the prisoners were still *in the hands* of the Muslims and *that which has been taken* is clearly *the ransom*, which must have taken many days to reach Madînah. If the verse had conveyed a Divine commandment to slay the prisoners and not to release them, that step could still have been taken. But the very fact that no such step was taken, shows clearly that the verse conveyed no such Divine commandment.

The legality of the Holy Prophet’s procedure on this occasion is clearly borne out by an earlier revelation: “So when you meet in battle those who disbelieve, smite the necks; then, when you have overcome them, make them prisoners, and afterwards set them free as a favour or for ransom” (47:4). The Prophet never slew a single prisoner of war, even after the battle of Badr, though thousands of prisoners were taken in some of these battles. On the other hand, the prisoners were almost always set free as a favour, and ransom was taken only from the Badr prisoners.

The question is what is then hinted at in this verse and in the one that follows? To me it seems quite clear that the reference is to the *desire* (mark the word *desire* used in the verse) — not to an action already completed — of a party of the Muslims referred to in verse 7, of chapter 8: ‘*and you loved that the one not armed should be yours*’. Some Muslims desired to attack and capture the unarmed caravan, but depredations like these, though committed by disbelievers upon the Muslims, were not fit for a prophet. He must fight a hard fight in his defence first and then, if he overcomes the enemy, he may take prisoners. Thus this injunction also declares slavery to be illegal, and allows only the retaining of those who are taken prisoners in war. The *frail goods of this world* appropriately refer to the caravan and its merchandise, while the addition of the concluding words in verse 69 of chapter 8, ‘*eat then of the lawful and good things which you have acquired in war*’, shows that the ransom received on account of the prisoners is among the *lawful and good things*.

69 Eat then of the lawful and good (things) which you have acquired in war, and keep your duty to Allâh. Surely Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.

SECTION 10: Relations of Muslim State with others

70 O Prophet, say to those of the captives who are in your hands: If Allâh knows anything good in your hearts, He will give you better than that which has been taken from you, and will forgive you. And Allâh is Forgiving, Merciful.

71 And if they intend to be treacherous to you, so indeed they have been treacherous to Allâh before, but He gave (you) mastery over them. And Allâh is Knowing, Wise.

72 Surely those who believed and fled (their homes) and struggled hard in Allâh’s way with their wealth and their lives, and those who gave shelter and helped — these are friends one of another. And those who believed and did not flee, you are not responsible for their protection until they flee. And if they seek help from you in the matter of *Dîn*, it is your duty to help (them) except against a people between whom and you there is a treaty. And Allâh is Seer of what you do.^a

68a. That ordinance from Allâh is referred to in several places in this chapter; it was to bring about an encounter with the main army of the Quraish at Badr: “And when

Allâh promised you one of the two parties that it should be yours ... and Allah desired to establish the Truth” (verse 7); and again: “In order that Allâh might bring about a matter which had to be done” (verse 42).

68b. You say *akhadha fî kadhâ* meaning *he took to a thing, or set about or commenced doing it* (*Arabic-English Lexicon* by Edward William Lane).

73 And those who disbelieve are friends one of another. If you do it not, there will be persecution in the land and great mischief.^a

74 And those who believed and fled and struggled hard in Allâh’s way and those who gave shelter and helped— these are the believers truly. For them is forgiveness and an honourable provision.

75 And those who believed afterwards and fled and struggled hard along with you, they are of you. And the relatives are nearer one to another in the ordinance of Allâh. Surely Allâh is Knower of all things.^a

72a. The friendship alluded to in this verse has been a matter of much discussion among the commentators. The meaning seems to be clear. Those who believed, and, having been persecuted, fled from their homes, formed a community at Madînah along with those who gave them shelter and helped them, i.e., the *Anṣâr*. But there were those who chose to remain in their homes. The Muslim community at Madînah could not undertake to guard the interests of such persons, and this is what is meant by saying, *you are not responsible for their protection*. But if they seek help in the matter of religion, it is incumbent on the Muslim community to give them help, unless there exists a treaty of alliance with the people against whom such help is sought.

73a. If you do not help your brethren in the matter of *Dîn*, the disbelievers will become more daring in their persecutions and in causing mischief and disorder in the land.

75a. When even strangers who have accepted Islâm and fled from their homes become “of you”, those who have in addition ties of relationship, possess every title to have their interests guarded by the Muslim community.